

# The Service's Involvement in *Gulf Restoration*



Limestone was used to construct a protective "living shoreline" on an island in Galveston Bay, photo: Woody Woodrow, USFWS

*The USFWS is an active member of, and collaborating with, the key groups and administrative processes overseeing many Gulf restoration funds.*

## **The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Involvement in the Restoration of the Gulf of Mexico**

The Gulf of Mexico is a natural treasure that supports diverse and abundant wildlife while powering a vital economic engine made up of the nation's most critical energy, shipping, tourism, seafood, recreation and other industries. With so much at stake, the Fish and Wildlife Service is deeply involved in the multi-billion dollar restoration efforts in the Gulf funded by the settlement of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

### **Background**

The *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill in 2010 was the largest offshore oil spill in the history of the United States, releasing approximately 3.19 million barrels (134 million gallons) over 87 days and causing widespread and severe injury to the nation's natural resources and the services they provide.

Resolution of civil and criminal claims against BP, Transocean and other responsible parties has made an unprecedented level of funding available for environmental restoration.

- National Fish and Wildlife Federation (NFWF): \$2.544 billion
- North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA): \$100 million
- Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR): \$8.8 billion
- Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration (RESTORE) Council: \$5.3 billion
- National Academy of Sciences (NAS): \$500 million



*Northern Aplomado falcon, photo: USFWS*

The Service has no unilateral control over any of the settlement dollars, but has responsibilities specifically assigned by law with regards to the funds. The Service serves as a consultant to NFWF, an advisor to NAS and an administrator of NAWCA with respect to their DWH-related funds. In addition, it has a significant role as a NRDAR trustee and an indirect role through the Department of the Interior's role as RESTORE Council member.



## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologists assessed the damage caused by the oil spill with partners from other agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service, photo: Bonnie Strawser/USFWS

The Service has been – and will continue to be -- heavily involved in Gulf restoration project planning, selection and implementation for a majority of the settlement dollars.

### The Challenge

*Deepwater Horizon* oil spill-related restoration funds are controlled by a number of different entities and their respective uses governed by different regulations and requirements. Thus, restoring the Gulf of Mexico is one of the most complex and comprehensive conservation efforts ever undertaken. Restoration success depends on effective coordination among the five Gulf States (i.e., Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas), multiple federal agencies, hundreds of local governments, non-governmental organizations, and citizens.

The Service is actively engaged in conservation planning and project delivery for large-scale Gulf restoration that will achieve the greatest and most immediate benefit to the public's fish and wildlife resources.

### Service accomplishments to date

- The Service worked with state and federal partners and the Department of Justice to finalize the \$20.8 billion global settlement with BP in 2016 -- the largest civil settlement in the history of the United States.
- The Service led the NRDAR Trustee Council's pre-settlement restoration effort (commonly called "Early Restoration"), which included development of five restoration plans that comprise 65 projects with a combined value of \$866 million.
- The Service's Early Restoration projects will provide beach and dune restoration and enhanced habitat for both nesting sea turtles and beach-nesting bird.
- The Service worked with state and federal partners to complete both the NRDAR Programmatic Damage

Assessment and Restoration Plan and a revised RESTORE Council Comprehensive Plan. Together, these documents lay out the multi-billion-dollar strategy that will be used to restore, protect, and revitalize the Gulf region over the next decade.

- Since the settlement, the Service has proposed projects that, if approved would add approximately 3,559 acres to two national wildlife refuges and provide 18 miles of beach and dune restoration that would benefit the interior marshes of another national wildlife refuge.
- The Service contributed significantly to the RESTORE Council's efforts to develop and fund its Funded Priority List project totaling \$140 million, with the Service's environmental compliance efforts helping to move \$80 million of projects from the "planning" to "implementation" category -- thus expediting the start of those projects on the ground.
- The Service is taking the lead in the RESTORE Council-funded Strategic Conservation Assessment for Gulf Lands, a three-year, \$1.9 million project that will create three conservation planning tools to assist in the identification and evaluation of future land conservation proposals in the Gulf Coast region

### Next Steps

The Service has released two cross-program documents, *Vision for a Healthy Gulf of Mexico Watershed* in 2013 and *Next Steps for a Healthy Gulf of Mexico Watershed* in 2017, that identify geographically based high-priority focal areas, overarching restoration and conservation strategies, and specific recommendations to help align the efforts of the Service with its partners and other stakeholders. Both emphasize a restoration approach that considers not only the Gulf Coast, but also the entire watershed that feeds the Gulf. Through conversations informed by the contents in the documents, the Service can help in the early planning stages of projects to evaluate the risks and benefits of proposed activities to species and their habitats, and contribute the best available science and expertise to assist in the decision-making process regarding the allocation of funds.



Green sea turtle hatchling, photo: Keenan Adams/USFWS